

• 34th District • 2011 Session Review

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Dear Neighbors,

The 2011 legislative session is over and it's great to be back home! Thank you to all who contacted our offices to let us know your thoughts and concerns on issues that are important to our neighborhoods in West Seattle, Burien, and Vashon and Maury Island.

This session was especially difficult, as we dealt with historic challenges in writing the state's budget. Because of the Great Recession, state revenues were still down, forcing the Legislature to pass a budget that cuts state spending on critical services by \$4.6 billion--more than 12 percent of the overall budget.

In spite of those cuts, we were able to protect many critical services and programs in the budget, including basic education in our public schools, the Basic Health Plan and health care for kids. We also managed to pass significant reforms to improve schools, create jobs and protect the environment.

This was Joe's freshman year in the Legislature, and he was quite busy serving on the House Committees dealing with issues related to transportation, local government, and the environment. Meanwhile, Sharon finished her first session in the Senate, serving as Vice Chair of the Environment, Water & Energy Committee and sitting on the K-12 Education, Transportation, and General Government Committees. Eileen spent the session working hard to implement federal health care reform and to drive down the cost of health insurance in Washington state.

It is an honor and a privilege to represent you in Olympia and to serve as your voice. As always, never hesitate to contact us with your comments, questions or ideas. Now that session is over, we also have more time to meet with people and groups in district to discuss the 2011 session, or to talk about new ideas for developing public policy next year. Just give us a call or send an email!

Your 34th District Legislators,

Sharon K. Nelson

Eileen Cody

Joe Fitzgibbon



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POSITIVE STEPS IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

This year saw much progress for environmental priorities, despite facing a daunting budget. I'm proud to have helped pass efforts to protect our rural farms and forests from sprawl, reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses

and preserve state recreational lands.

ENDING COAL-GENERATED POWER IN WASHINGTON



Many are shocked to learn that for years, our state's largest polluter, the TransAlta coal plant, has been the recipient of a \$4 million tax break. But with an agreement to finally close the plant, this will soon end and Washington will be significant step closer

to being truly coal-free. This year, while serving as Vice Chair of the Environment, Water & Energy Committee, I worked with colleagues to successfully enact a compromise to close the last two coal boilers in our state – the first in 2020 and the second in 2025. The agreement provides a path to cleaner power while allowing the necessary time to provide stability to the electrical grid and to the community currently dependent upon the plant.

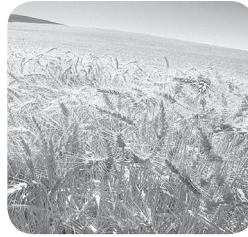
SAVING OUR STATE PARKS AND RECREATIONAL LANDS



In Washington State, fishing and hunting alone create over \$1.4 billion in economic activity annually and account for over 14,000 jobs, much of which is generated as a result of open state recreational lands. Unfortunately, it became clear early on in

the budget process that without new revenue, these very lands were going to face severe reductions to funding – reductions that likely would have led to widespread closure of state parks, hunting lands, fishing areas and other recreational areas. To save these lands from insolvency, we created a universal parking pass for motor vehicle access to any of these lands. Projected revenue is expected to exceed \$70 million – enough to keeps the gates open across the state.

REDUCING SPRAWL, REVITALIZING COMMUNITIES



Hundreds of thousands of acres of working farms and forest lands in the Puget Sound region may now be preserved under legislation that passed into law this session. The first legislation of its kind in the country, Senate Bill 5253 will allow farmers in King, Pierce, and

Snohomish Counties to preserve their working farms while realizing the full value of their real estate through a real estate tool known as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) that shifts development rights to areas more suitable for population growth. At the same time, the measure will also empower cities to make much-needed infrastructure improvements with a new financing tool allowing cities to bond against future tax revenue generated by development projects. This multifaceted legislation really does create a "win-win" situation for farmers, local governments, environmentalists, and the private sector.

With passage of these crucial efforts, we maintain our ever-green legacy for generations to come.



PROTECTING OUR NEIGHBORS FROM FORECLOSURE

As you know, our region has been particularly hard hit by the housing crisis. Like the rest of the state, many of our friends and neighbors continue to struggle to pay their mortgages and some are even in danger of facing foreclosure.

With this in mind, the Senate and House worked together to adopt the Foreclosure Fairness Act. Under this bill, banks will be required to sit down with homeowners and explore options outside of foreclosure. It requires lenders to communicate early in the foreclosure process to give homeowners the best opportunities to get help from a housing counselor and provides a mediation process when a housing counselor or attorney deems it appropriate. The legislation also requires banks which issue more than 250 notices of default in the preceding year to pay a \$250 fee on each notice of default. The fee will primarily fund more housing counselors, but will also fund outreach campaigns and enforcement dollars for the Attorney General's Office.

With this bill in place, my hope is that we can begin to curtail the devastating amount of foreclosures that have plagued our neighborhoods. Foreclosure isn't just the problem of the family facing it, foreclosures devastates neighborhoods, lowers property values and separates families.



COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS

There are currently 130,000 people on the waiting list for the Basic Health Plan, and Community Health Clinics sustained further cuts. The Medicaid program will no longer pay for hearing aids or glasses, and people with Medicaid coverage will have limited cov-

erage for services like physical therapy.

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

The local public health departments and programs were cut by \$10 million, which hurts their ability to track the outbreaks of infectious diseases and educate the public about preventing diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer.

HEALTH CARE AND THE BUDGET

By 2014, states are required to implement the first phases of federal health care reform. As chair of Health Care and Wellness, it is my role to prepare our state for a smooth transition, and do our part with the services and business to bring the costs of health care under control.

COST SAVING INITIATIVES

Evidence based best practices (HB 1311)

We passed the Bree Collaborative, named after Dr. Robert Bree, which establishes a collaborative to identify highly utilized medical procedures and promote the use of evidence based best practices to improve health care outcomes and reduce costs. As the author of this legislation, I want to thank everyone who helped get it passed and signed into law.

Primary Care Health Homes (SB 5394)

This bill requires that state health plans such as Medicaid, Basic Health, and Public

Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) must include provisions in contracts that encourage broad use of primary care health homes, and emphasize the use of health homes in chronic care management. This will facilitate broader use of managed care, thereby improving health care outcomes and reducing costs.

Holding Insurance Companies Accountable (HB 1220)

This landmark legislation requires health carriers in the individual or small group to submit a rate increase request and summary, and the Insurance Commissioner must prepare a standardized rate summary form to explain his or her findings. The results must be made available to the public 10 days after the filing is complete, which will allow consumers to compare costs among carriers before committing to another year of coverage.

More Choices for Affordable Health Care (SB 5445)

This bill establishes a health insurance Exchange. Beginning

January 1, 2014, there will be one-stop shopping for individuals and small businesses who want to purchase health insurance coverage. People who buy coverage through the Exchange will be eligible for premium subsidies to keep coverage affordable, and can be linked with Medicaid coverage if they are poor.

PRESERVING OUR COMMITMENT TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Covering All Kids (SB 5122)

This initiative changes our state's insurance laws so that young adults can receive coverage under their parents plans until age 26, and kids under age 19 cannot be subjected to pre-existing conditions limitations.

Immunizations for Kids (SB 5005)

This legislation reforms childhood immunization, which is cheap, effective and saves the lives of thousands of children each year. Washington state is number one in the nation for immunization exemptions, which puts other children at risk. This legislation requires that parents receive information from a doctor on the risk and benefits of immunization before submitting an exemption to their local school.

IMPROVEMENTS IN LONG TERM CARE

LTC Oversight (HB 1277)

In response to reports of abuse and neglect within the adult family home system, HB 1277 aims to ensure the safety of and promote higher quality care for our elderly and disabled populations. It expanding licensing requirements for adult family home providers related to financial solvency and provides DSHS with mechanisms for accountability from owners.

Referral Agencies (HB 1494)

This bill works to protect vulnerable adults by establishing regulations of home care referral agencies. Such businesses must provide informed, unbiased, professional advice to best meet the overall needs of each client. Any act in violation of the regulations is an unfair or deceptive act in trade or commerce and an unfair method of competition under the Consumer Protection Act.

THE MOST HIGH PROFILE CUTS INCLUDE:

***The Basic Health Plan.** While this program was scheduled to be eliminated under other budget proposals, I fought hard to keep the structure intact, for two key reasons. It is the only health coverage that many working people can afford, and the BHP has been considered a model for the type of plan that states can set up in regards to federal health reform. I am very proud of Washington for being a leader in access to affordable health care, and I believe it is critically important to maintain the prototype to demonstrate its success. The result was reduced eligibility to 133% of the federal poverty level. Enrollment will decrease to 37,000 in FY 2012 and 33,000 in FY 2013. When the Affordable Care Act is implemented, the federal government will take over the cost of the plan.

***Disability Lifeline.** We revised this program for the disabled to be an essential needs and housing program (maintaining the medical care but eliminating the prior cash stipend).



TRANSPORTATION BUDGET

With viaduct-related construction underway, many of us have noticed significantly longer commutes from West Seattle, Burien, and Vashon. Fortunately, the state has funded increases in transit service on bus routes serving our communities, and significant increases in ridership have been ob-

served on the West Seattle and Vashon passenger ferries. However, it is clear that we have more work to do to ensure that our communities are not isolated by the changes in the viaduct corridor.

You don't have to step far out of your house to see that transit, bicycling, and walking are a growing part of how we get around. Climate change, rising gas prices, and mixed-use planning are all reducing the amount of time we spend in cars. This is great news, but not for our state transportation budget.

We currently fund most transportation projects using the gas tax, and in the coming two-year budget, that will fund continued work on the viaduct replacement project. However, gas tax revenue is declining due to the increasing fuel economy of our vehicles and more people choosing to walk, bike, and ride transit. In order to maintain our deteriorating infrastructure and invest in mobility for people and commerce, we won't be able to rely on a tax based on fossil fuel. I will be working in coming years to invest in transportation options that keep our communities connected to our region's economy, and this will require transportation revenue other than the gas tax.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I have been fighting to secure improved transportation options for West Seattle, Burien, and Vashon, including transit, ferries, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and better access to our region's highways.

One bright note is the beginning of construction on the South Park Bridge. While the new bridge will not open for a few more years, this construction work is putting hundreds of our neighbors to work, and when the bridge is complete, it will significantly ease congestion throughout our communities, especially on the 1st Avenue South bridge.



WASHINGTON STATE FERRIES

While our ferry system has been going through some rough water, right now we're encouraged by some reforms made this session. Unusual wage arrangements set up the possibility of abuse, and we've now closed those loopholes while still re-



specting the labor contracts signed by our ferry workers. In order to make sure the ferry system management is performing at its high-

est, we're requiring they meet performance criteria so riders get efficient, safe service. Thanks to labor concessions by the ferry workers, we saved \$10 million in ferry system operating costs, and these cost savings were used to prevent service cuts on our ferry routes.

I am proud to have successfully prevented proposed service cuts and helped secure funding for the construction of a new 144-car ferry. The construction of this ferry will also create hundreds of jobs as it is assembled right here in the 34th District. Replacing vessels is key to ensuring consistent service everywhere and maintaining the integrity of our ferry system, the state's most popular tourist attraction and a big creator of good jobs.



VULNERABLE ROADWAY USERS

As more people walk and bike to get to work, to school, and around town, it's important that everyone using the road feel safe. When a car driver isn't paying attention and hits a pedestrian instead of another car, the result is often devastating. In the past, though, that collision causing serious injury to a pedestrian, bicyclist, or motorcyclist would warrant only a traffic ticket.

I introduced legislation to fix this gap in the law for vulnerable roadway users seriously injured or killed when hit by a vehicle. Governor Gregoire signed this legislation into law, which increases the default penalty but gives the driver the opportunity to reduce the penalty by attending traffic school. I will continue to work in coming years on policies that improve the safety of our roads and highways for drivers, pedestrians, and all users.



REVENUE UPDATE

Despite the restrictions imposed by I-1053, the 34th District delegation remains strongly in support of raising revenue to preserve our safety net and to fully fund education. This session Eileen prime-sponsored HB 1847 to close wasteful tax loopholes in order to fund the Basic Health Plan, and Sharon sponsored a Senate effort to allow the Legislature to close tax loopholes with a simple majority vote, not the current two-thirds requirement. Unfortunately neither of these passed out of committee, but they did began the revenue discussion

This session myself and the other House Democratic freshmen developed HB 2078, which would eliminate tax exemptions for Wall Street banks and use money to reduce class sizes from kindergarten through third grade. This bill was brought to the House floor and received a majority vote of 52-42. That should mean it passed, but since it didn't meet the supermajority two-thirds requirement of I-1053, it failed. However, this does position the Legislature to seek clarification on the constitutionality of I-1053, to see if you can truly amend the state constitution by an initiative.

RESTORING FUNDING FOR THE ARTS IN KING COUNTY

Funding for arts and cultural programs in King County that was set to expire in 2012 was revived final days of special session this year. Senate Bill 5834 will redirect King County's hotel/motel tax from debt service on the Kingdome stadium— which will be paid off later this year— to fund arts programs throughout the county.

Our vibrant arts community helps make Seattle and King County one of the most desirable places to live in the country, and the industry also generates significant revenue in our local economy, accounting for over 30,000 jobs and \$1.75 billion in business activity each year. In addition to funding for the arts, the legislation also makes an important investment in affordable workforce housing so that workers and their families can live closer to their places of work.



PRESERVING AS MANY PROGRAMS AS POSSIBLE: EDUCATION

Like all areas of state government, our public schools were not immune from the harsh realities of the budget crisis this session, forcing us to make painful cuts to our K-12 education system that will undoubtedly be felt throughout the state. While we attempted to maintain the foundation of our K-12 education system while facing the harsh realities of this budget, we did make difficult cuts which will impact our children. House Bill 1131 suspends Initiative 728, which allocates funds for K-4 class size reductions. House Bill 1132 suspends Initiative 732, which allocates funds to provide an annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for educational and academic employees. As a way to address potential funding problems in school districts, House Bill 1815 will ensure local districts don't lose their ability to receive already voter-approved funds, which is especially important for districts that are property-poor. In high poverty areas of the state, we invested \$33.6 million toward reducing class sizes for students in grades K-3.

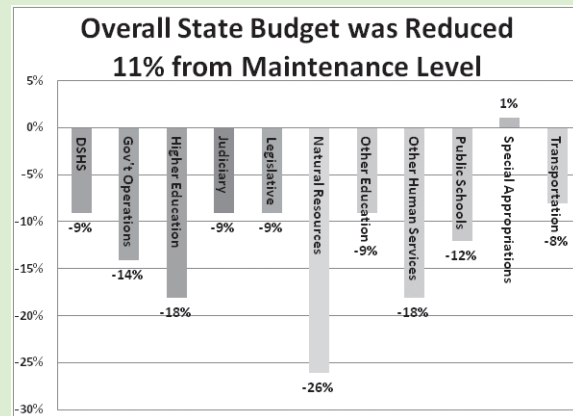
BALANCING THE BUDGET

This year, we faced one of the toughest budgets in state history. In many respects, balancing the budget was even harder than it would have been during the Great Depression, because prior to World War II, our government was much smaller, and provided less service than we do currently.

Today, government plays a much larger role in the collective security of our population and communities, and people rely on the services that are provided.

Without the option of raising revenue, deciding how to apportion \$4.5 billion in cuts was excruciating, particularly because the discretionary spending portion of the state budget are the programs that assist our low-income, elderly, and disabled populations. The knowledge that regardless of how the cuts were apportioned, the brunt of the budget crisis would be shouldered by our most vulnerable, is deeply disheartening.

We spread the cuts across the spectrum of services to minimize the impact as much as possible. The following chart explains the general breakdown:



**Representative
Eileen Cody**

**Senator
Sharon Nelson**

**Representative
Joe Fitzgibbon**

STATE INVESTMENT IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Building Communities Fund Navos Mental Health & Wellness Center	\$2,350,000
Recreation and Conservation WWRP - Urban Wildlife Habitat - Whispering Firs Bog	\$400,000
Local & Community Projects TAF Community Learning Space	\$1,500,000

Your 34th District Legislators

Sen. Sharon Nelson

Committees:

- Environment Water & Energy (Vice Chair)
- Early Learning & K-12 Education
- Government Operations Tribal Relations & Elections
- Transportation

Rep. Eileen Cody

Committees:

- Health Care & Wellness (Chair)
- Health & Human Services Appropriations & Oversight
- Ways & Means

Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon

Committees:

- Environment
- General Government Appropriations & Oversight
- Local Government
- Transportation



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**State Senator SHARON NELSON
State Representatives
EILEEN CODY & JOE FITZGIBBON**

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